Study Online with Open Christian University and Earn a State-licensed Qualification from California, USA

What is Prophetic Worship and Is It Biblical?

Sixbert SANGWA • August 17, 2024

Prophetic worship is a growing trend within the Charismatic movement that involves spontaneous music, dance, and various artistic expressions, all believed to convey a "new" word from God. The term "prophetic" in this context refers to the practice of hearing God's voice in one's heart and communicating that message, often through spontaneous song or other forms of expression. Supporters of prophetic worship claim that these expressions are inspired by God, much like the messages delivered by Old Testament prophets.

A defining characteristic of prophetic worship is its emphasis on spontaneity. Unlike traditional worship services, which follow a structured program with pre-written lyrics and rehearsed music, prophetic worship encourages participants to improvise as they feel led by the Spirit. Worship leaders are expected to receive the words and music directly from God in the moment, leading to a worship experience that is fluid, unscripted, and often accompanied by other Charismatic practices such as speaking in tongues, ecstatic utterances, and claims of miraculous healings. Terms like *"the spirit of Elijah," "Ishoshaphat worship style," "anointing,"* and *"soaking"* are frequently used in this context, further distinguishing this style of worship from more traditional forms.

Advocates of prophetic worship often point to various passages of Scripture, primarily from the Old Testament, to support their practices. For instance, they cite the inclusion of a song at the end of the Book of Habakkuk (Habakkuk 3:1–19) as evidence of a connection between music and the prophetic. They also reference King David, who was both a prophet and a musician, and who danced spontaneously before the Lord as recorded in 2 Samuel 6:14. These examples are used to justify the belief that music, dance, and other art forms can be vehicles for new prophetic revelation today. Furthermore, critics of prophetic worship are often compared to Michal, who despised David for dancing before the Lord, implying that any opposition to this worship style is akin to a lack of spiritual understanding or acceptance.

The Biblical Basis for Worship and Prophecy

To further assess the validity of prophetic worship, it is essential to examine what Scripture says about worship and prophecy. The Bible provides clear guidance on both, and understanding these principles is crucial for discerning whether the practices involved in prophetic worship align with biblical teachings.

1. The Nature of Prophecy in the Bible

Prophecy in the Bible is defined as the act of delivering a message from God. The Old Testament prophets, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, were chosen by God to communicate His will to the people. Their messages were often prefaced with phrases like *"Thus says the Lord"* (Isaiah 7:7; Jeremiah 2:5), emphasizing that their words were not their own but were directly from God. Importantly, these prophetic messages were always in line with God's established Word and were confirmed by their fulfillment (Deuteronomy 18:21-22)

The New Testament also speaks of prophecy, particularly in the context of the early church. However, the role of prophecy in the New Testament differs from that of the Old Testament prophets. The New Testament prophets were given specific revelations by God, but these revelations never contradicted the teachings of Christ or the apostles (1 Corinthians 14:3, 37). Moreover, the canon of Scripture is considered complete, meaning that the Bible contains all the revelation necessary for faith and practice (2 Timothy 3:16-17; Revelation 22:18-19).

2. Worship Must Be in Spirit and in Truth

Jesus, in His conversation with the Samaritan woman, defined true worship as worship *"in spirit and in truth"* (John 4:24). This statement implies that worship must be guided by the Holy Spirit and rooted in the truth of God's Word. Worship is not merely about emotional expression or creativity; it is about aligning one's heart and actions with the truth of Scripture.

The danger of prophetic worship is that it often blurs the line between emotional spontaneity and the truth of God's Word. While spontaneity in worship is not inherently wrong, it becomes problematic when it leads to practices that contradict Scripture or elevate personal experiences to the level of divine revelation. For instance, the Bible warns against adding to God's Word (Proverbs 30:5-6; Revelation 22:18-19). When prophetic worship suggests that new revelations are being given through song or artistic expressions, it risks violating this command.

3. The Sufficiency of Scripture

The Bible is clear that God's Word is sufficient for all matters of faith and practice. Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, *"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."* This passage emphasizes that Scripture alone is sufficient to equip believers for every aspect of their spiritual lives.

The claim that prophetic worship provides new revelations from God undermines the sufficiency of Scripture. If the Bible is sufficient, then no new revelation is needed. The apostle Peter also affirms the completeness of God's revelation, stating that *"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and excellence"* (2 Peter 1:3). The Bible provides everything we need to know about God, salvation, and living a godly life. Therefore, any practice that suggests the need for additional revelation is unbiblical.

4. Testing the Spirits

Scripture instructs believers to *"test the spirits to see whether they are from God"* (1 John 4:1). This means that any claim to divine inspiration, especially with the current blend of occultism in Christianity, must be carefully examined against the truth of Scripture. Prophetic worship, with its emphasis on spontaneous revelations, must be scrutinized to ensure it does not lead to false teachings or practices that contradict God's Word.

Jesus Himself warned against false prophets who would come in His name, leading people astray (Matthew 7:15-20). The apostle Paul also cautioned the church in Galatia about those who would preach a different gospel, even if they claimed to receive it from an angel (Galatians 1:8-9). These warnings highlight the importance of guarding against teachings that deviate from the truth of Scripture. Prophetic worship, by introducing new and untested revelations, opens the door to potential deception and confusion within the church.

5. The Role of Tongues and Ecstatic Utterances

Prophetic worship often includes speaking in tongues and ecstatic utterances, common practices in Charismatic circles. However, the Bible provides specific guidelines for the use of tongues in worship. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul emphasizes that tongues should be used in an orderly manner and must be interpreted so the entire congregation can be edified (1 Corinthians 14:27-28). He also states that *"God is not a God of confusion but of peace"*, indicating that worship should promote understanding and unity, not disorder and confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33).

The unstructured nature of prophetic worship, where tongues and ecstatic utterances are often used without interpretation or order, conflicts with these biblical instructions. Without clear guidelines and interpretations, these practices can lead to confusion and division within the church, rather than the edification that Paul advocates.

A primary danger of prophetic worship is its tendency to equate spontaneous expressions with Holy Scripture. Practices like glossolalia (speaking in tongues), inner impressions, and on-the-spot lyrics are often treated as divinely inspired messages on par with the Bible. This approach diminishes the authority of God's Word and opens the door to potential deception. Scripture is clear that the Word of God is complete and sufficient for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Any attempt to add to God's Word or place other revelations on the same level is a serious error.

6. The Danger of Elevating Experience Over Scripture

One of the most concerning aspects of prophetic worship is the potential for elevating personal experience above the authority of Scripture. In prophetic worship, the feelings, impressions, and spontaneous expressions of individuals are often treated as direct messages from God. However, the Bible cautions against relying on subjective experiences as the basis for truth. Jeremiah 17:9 warns that *"the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"* Our emotions and experiences can be misleading, and they must always be tested against the objective truth of God's Word.

The apostle Peter, despite having witnessed the transfiguration of Christ, emphasized the reliability of Scripture over personal experiences. In 2 Peter 1:19, he writes, *"And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts."* Peter highlights the importance of Scripture as the ultimate guide for believers, even above extraordinary personal experiences.

7. The Authority of Prophets and Apostles

Prophetic worship often involves individuals claiming the role of prophet or apostle, suggesting that they have the authority to deliver new revelations from God. However, the Bible teaches that the office of prophet and apostle was unique to the foundational period of the church. The apostles, in particular, were eyewitnesses of Christ's resurrection and were given the authority to establish the teachings of the New Testament (Ephesians 2:20). Paul himself identifies the apostles and prophets as part of the foundation of the church, with Christ as the cornerstone.

In contrast, the New Testament does not support the idea of ongoing apostolic or prophetic authority in the same sense as the original apostles and prophets. Ephesians 4:11-13 describes the offices of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers as gifts given to the church *"until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood."* While the church still benefits from prophetic and apostolic teaching through the Scriptures, the idea of modern-day prophets and apostles with new revelations is not biblically supported.

Moreover, those who claim the role of prophet or apostle, suggesting that they have the same authority as Elijah or Paul, risk falling into pride, which Scripture warns against. James 4:6 states, *"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."* Such claims can lead to confusion and division within the church, as they shift the focus away from the foundational truths of Scripture and onto subjective experiences.

Conclusion: Worship in Spirit and in Truth

In conclusion, while the spontaneity and creativity of prophetic worship may appeal to many, it is crucial to evaluate such practices against the clear teachings of Scripture. The Bible calls us to worship God *"in spirit and in truth"* (John 4:24), meaning our worship must be both sincere and rooted in the truth of God's Word. Practices that elevate personal experience, suggest new revelations, or claim prophetic authority on par with Scripture are dangerous and unbiblical.

Scripture is our final authority, and it is complete, sufficient, and fully inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16-17). As believers, we are called to test all things against the truth of God's Word, holding fast to what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21). In doing so, we guard ourselves against deception and ensure that our worship remains pleasing to God, glorifying Him in both spirit and truth.

Related Articles

- What Is Prophetic Prayer, and Is It Biblical?
- What Is Prophetic Ministry and Is It Biblical?
- Are We Standing on the Brink of the Church Rapture?
- Should Christians Seek After Spiritual Enlightenment?
- Is the Emerging New World Order Fulfilling Biblical Prophecy?
- Why Should Christians Be Careful About Their Spiritual Associations?
- What Is the True World Hierarchy and How Does It Cooperate for the New World Order?

Further Resources

- Explore Online Ministry Opportunities at Open Christian Ministries (USA)
- Explore Christian Business Services at the Center for Faith and Work (Rwanda)
- Pursue an Affordable Online Christian Degree at Open Christian University (USA)
- Kindly Share Your Question for Consideration in Future Articles. Click Here to Submit
- Ask a Question or Utilize Our Trained AI Bot to Craft Your Evangelical Article - Begin Here

← Back to blog

Comments (0)

Post Comment